

楠谷佑



Unmotivated Detective Work

Case 1: No Matter the Era, Dying Messages are Always Y

by Kusutani Tasuku

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [Yoraikun Translation](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Problem

Part 1

If the main character of a story is a male high school student, their seat must always be by the window. By the window, around second from the back. A certain student of the private Yumoto Academy's high school division, Kirishima Chizuru just happened to sit by the window, two seats from the back. He had only just entered his second year in the high school division, and at present, the light tree-filtered sunlight of spring was pouring into the classroom, and Chizuru was taking an afternoon nap. To the surprise of none, this could also be called part of the standard formula.

The one who sat beside him, Beppu Ageha seemed resigned at the sight of Chizuru's sleeping face. Class was still in session. But be that as it may, she and Chizuru had been together through the middle school division, enough time for anyone to grow accustomed to his conduct.

The math teacher who spoke on and on of imaginary numbers caught the sleeping boy in his sights, and slowly made his way to his seat.

Sensing a presence, Chizuru slowly raised his head.

"Kirishima... were you listening to what I was saying?"

"No. I wasn't listening, what of it?"

His double-eyelids were still dangling in drowsiness. Once his long eyelashes leisurely lowered to cover his eyes, his body followed suite to cover his desk. The math teacher grabbed Chizuru's shoulders and pulled him up.

"What's with you, each and every time..."

"You say each and every time, but..."

Chizuru put up some vague back-talk.

"Teacher, you've only been appointed to this school this year, and it's only the third class we've had together. Just looking at the frequency, I doubt it's that big of a problem."

“Quit splitting hairs. You were sleeping three out of three times, so that’s a hundred percent. Do you have any self-awareness that you’re in Yumoto Academy... the most prestigious prep school in the prefecture? What’s more, of the two hundred second year students, the special curriculum that only selects forty.”

“Thank you for the courteous explanation teacher. Um, I am aware of it, but if the class is on material I already understand, then I should set that time aside for sleep in order to restore my energy to study through the night at my own home: a decision beneficial for all sides, was there anything strange about it?”

A vein popped up on the forehead of the teacher in his thirties, his eyebrows twitching. For Chizuru’s fellow classmates who had grown accustomed to his conduct, they could predict what would come next.

“Everything was strange about it!”

Just as they thought, the teacher shouted out.

“People who don’t listen to lecture, no matter how good their grades may be, are destined to eventually fall! Your teacher has seen a number of those people!”

“In that case, it looks like I’ll be a valuable sample case you’ve never seen before in your teaching career.”

As Chizuru said that without the slightest change of expression, the corners of the teacher’s mouth twitched.

“Meaning?”

“Despite being a, ‘person who doesn’t listen to lecture,’ my grades will never fall.”

Unable to endure it any longer, the teacher pointed at the blackboard.

“What nonsense. If this lesson really is meaningless to you, then go solve the problem on the board! Right now! On the spot!”

Chizuru slowly leaned his body out to take a glance at the blackboard concealed behind the teacher’s form. The moment the board came into his sight, he opened his mouth. It was a space of two and a half seconds.

"X equals negative one. Or three minus two i."

"... Hah?"

The teacher blankly opened his mouth. And as if to check if he had the question wrong, he turned to look back that board. On it was an overly complex geometric figure, accompanied by a word problem so tediously long one wouldn't think it was formulated by anyone smart. The teacher had yet to write the answer.

"Huh, just now you... huh?"

"Didn't you hear? X equals negative one. Or three minus two i."

"Eh? I mean, you... you... huh?"

Confused as he was, the teacher timidly put a hand to his mouth. A few seconds later, with an awkward smile on his face, he returned to the podium. As if he couldn't be at rest unless he was satisfied with this turn of events, he muttered to himself.

"What's this, so you were listening to my lecture after all."



After that, Chizuru tried laying his head down a number of times, but every time, Ageha would wake him.

And with this and that, math class came to an end, and as if leaping at his own desk, the boy took on a sleeping posture. As he did so, Ageha rose him with a poke.

"Ow... what is it Ageha? Class is already over."

"No, it's definitely over, but... Chizuru, you know, I know you're smart, but why not listen to class for now?"

Listening to Ageha's sermon, Chizuru stretched out. His hair was on the longer side for a boy's, hanging over to cover his right eye.

"There's no helping it. I mean, I was reading books all the way to morning."

"The way you said that was cleverly cute."

"It's not like I'm trying to act clever or anything..."

Chizuru and Ageha had been together through the middle school division, and

they would often talk to one another. Unless it was absolutely necessary, Chizuru wouldn't establish conversation with anyone. Therefore, it was mainly Ageha who started up these talks.

"Even so, I was surprised at that counterattack you launched on Itou-sensei. I knew you were a genius, but did you calculate that all in your head? I can't think that was humanly possible."

"How terrible... I'm a proper human."

"Sorry, sorry... hey, more importantly!"

Even when he was the one who started into it, Ageha changed the conversation. The words that followed completely diverted anywhere that conversation had been flowing.

"That look on Itou-sensei's face back there! He was really seething back there! I was sure Itou-sensei was a top, but it's that strong front of his that would make his teary face all the better if he was on the receiving side!!"

"... Good night."

Knowing Ageha's lecture on the romantic affairs between men would run for a long time, Chizuru decided to call it a night early.



Once sixth period was over, Chizuru and Ageha dropped by the library to kill some time. Chizuru wasn't affiliated with any club, and Ageha's newspaper club wasn't active today. They spent around two hours in the library room, and by the time they left school it was already passed six thirty.

From Yumoto Boulevard that had begun to show its evening bustle, they entered a side road.

"Chizuru, you're a genius, aren't you."

Under the twilight-dyed sky, Ageha spoke up quite suddenly.

"What's this, all of a sudden?"

"No, I was just thinking about it. Wondering what the best occupation to make use of your brains would be."

"... Hah?"

Chizuru abruptly turned to look at Ageha's face. His eyes turned to the hairpin

that adorned the left side of her head. It was made in the shape of a butterfly, almost as if it was made specifically to stick the name to the person, or so Chizuru mused.

(TL: The word Ageha means swallow-tailed butterfly.)

“I mean...”

Chizuru leisurely waved his hand in front of his face.

“Occupation? What’s that? You must be joking.”

“I’m being serious here. With a head as good as yours... maybe a doctor?”

“Eh? No way... a job that deals with peoples’ lives is way too heavy.”

“Then a college professor.”

“The responsibility of teaching others is heavy too.”

“Politician.”

“On top of heavy responsibility of the highest degree, I don’t want to be abused by the mass media.”

“Eh~, but with a head of your level, even if you used it on a normal career, it would just feel like a waste!”

“... I never said I’d use it on a normal career either.”

“Then what will you be?”

“Thinking about it.”

Chizuru let out a long breath.

“Yeah, I’m aware I have a good head on my shoulders.”

“R-right... when the person in question says it himself, I get this sort of indescribable irritation.”

“That’s why I... a job where I don’t have to put in any effort at all, and can just use my mind for a high pay, that’s the sort of job I want.”

“What’s that, your ideals are way too high. Does a job like that exist?”

“I haven’t found one yet, so I’m still searching.”

Chizuru slowly scratched his head.

“You know anything?”

“There’s no way there’s a job as convenient as that.”

As they carried out that unending conversation while they walked, the two of

them had come before a vacant lot. The lot was overgrown with a thick screen of various forms of vegetation, and it seemed like quite a likely place to find strange insects.

“Even so, Ageha, that hairpin of yours sure is flashy.”

“You think? I just wanted to try wearing an, ‘Ageha’.”

As I thought, thought Chizuru.

It’s flashy, but did you get any warnings from the teachers?”

“Not at all, not at all. See, our school’s regulations are on the more lenient side.”

That was definitely true. There were barely any restraints on attire. To an extent that Chizuru was able to wear a hoodie instead of a dress shirt under his blazer.

But isn’t yours a bit too showy, or so Chizuru was going to say, when Ageha suddenly raised an, “Ah,” and pointed towards the vacant lot.

“Hey, Chizuru.”

“What’s up, Ageha?”

“There’s someone lying flat over there.”

True enough, in the thickets, they could see a man in reddish clothing lying face down.

“What do you think he’s doing?”

“... You think there could be someone else?”

“Oh my, Chizuru. You think it’s that sort of thing?”

From there, as if suddenly struck with inspiration,

“You think it’s another man? A love between men?”

“... Why do your thoughts always go in that direction?”

“Well I’m sorry for being rotten. But this is something of an incurable ailment, and...”

Unable to bear another long-winded speech, Chizuru entered the vacant lot.

“Wait, Chizuru. What do you plan to do if that really is what’s going on?”

“No, looks like he’s alone, and...”

Stopping in mid-sentence, Chizuru held his mouth shut. And he rushed forward.

“What’s wrong!?”

Ageha ran behind. And seeing that, they both swallowed their spit.

“... Looks like he’s dead.”

Chizuru said it in a mutter. Sure enough, the man’s breath had ceased. The shirt that looked red was originally white, died with the blood flowing from the knife stuck in his back.

“This... can’t...”

Ageha was petrified. Chizuru took out his phone to contact the police as he inspected the body. And his eyes stopped at the end of its extended right hand.

“...!”

At the end of the victim’s extended right hand, was a letter he presumable scraped into the ground.

What looked to be a simple letter X.

Start	Title	Next→
-------	-------	-------

(TL: In the original text, the Dying message is a Y, therefore the title of the chapter. To make the mystery solvable to an English audience, it has been changed to an X. Later references back to this case will still call it the Y Case.)

Part 2

At the Yumoto Police Station, led to a space that gave off a receptions room feel, Chizuru and Ageha had been kept waiting long enough. Once the two had found the man's remains in the vacant lot, they contacted the police at once. And after they explained the situation to the officer who rushed over, "we have to draft up a protocol," he said, bringing them along to the station.

"Do you think it's really necessary to question us?"

Ageha quietly muttered. Even if it was April, the nights grew cold. The inside of that room was no exception, and her legs that extended out from the skirt of her uniform seemed a little unprepared.

"We only found the body by chance on our way home from school, and... well of course I'd assist with investigations if I could, but it's not like either of us know anything about this incident."

"It's bureaucratic busy work."

Even after they'd tasted the impact of discovering a body, Chizuru's words still held the unchanging feel they gave off when he spoke of how he didn't want to work an hour ago.

"... That man who died, I wonder what sort of person he was. His family must..."

As Ageha mumbled in earnesty, Chizuru— who sat lined next to her on the sofa— lightly tapped her shoulders.

"About that point, perhaps you could call it a small consolation. He didn't have any dependents. But that person... Shinozaki Kouichi-san was a middle school teacher, it seems, so maybe he has some grieving students."

Ageha slowly turned to look at Chizuru's face.

"... W-why do you know something like that? Did you know that person?"

"No, first time I saw him, he was dead."

Chizuru scratched his hair to play it off.

“I just saw the ID he had in his wallet.”

“You saw it!?”

“Shinozaki Kouichi-san, forty years old. Shimoda Junior High... that’s around three stations from here... Employed as a social studies teacher. The place he lived was right next to Shimoda Junior High, apparently.”

“... That’s some memory you have. Not that I have any way to check your answers.”

“Ah, we do have something like that.”

From his pocket, Chizuru produced a rectangular card. The driver’s license of the late Shinozaki Kouichi.

“Hey, wait Chizuru!! What the hell are you doing?”

“I put back everything else, but I carelessly forgot to return this one.”

“Forgot to... in the first place, why did you go through someone’s wallet? You didn’t nick any money, did you?”

“No, I just wanted to know a bit more about the guy. Even so, a license has a surprisingly scarce amount of information on it.”

“What do you have to gain from doing something like...”

As if to interrupt Ageha’s words, the door opened abruptly. Chizuru swiftly stuffed the license in his blazer.

The ones to enter the room were two who clearly looked like detectives.

The first was a female officer with a cream-colored suit over her body. Finely chiseled facial features, and her hair cut very short, if she earnestly tried to dress as a man, she’d likely look indistinguishable from one.

The other had a face that looked overly soft-natured, an unfortunate-looking young man. Just from his conduct as he passed through the doorway and closed the door behind him, it was clear he was the subordinate here.

“We’ve kept you waiting a while.”

The woman, meanwhile, let out a clear voice unbetraying of her appearance.

“I’m Ibusuki of the prefectural police department. This is my subordinate Atami.”

She casually pointed at the man. The female officer briskly took a seat at the sofa across the two high schoolers. Atami sat at a small one-man desk a little ways away. It seems he was in charge of writing up the protocol.

“Um... right. I’m Beppu Ageha. I go to Yumoto Academy... I’m a second year in the high school division.”

She poked the flank of the silent Chizuru. Chizuru painstakingly said, “Likewise, Kirishima Chizuru,” and cut it short. Without paying any mind to it, Officer Ibusuki went into the main topic at hand.

“To get right to it, let’s finish up protocol...”

And in rapid succession, the officer sent out her questions. Instead of letting the other party say whatever they wanted, doing it promptly one question at a time could precisely draw out the necessary information. Her way of speech implied she had taken that philosophy to heart. Chizuru could instantly tell she was a sharp one.

The district officer on duty had already swapped out, and after that uninterrupted stream of questions, Ibusuki finally provided some new information at the end.

“... By the way, there’s something I’d like to ask. This letter was left on the crime scene, but did either of you two write it?”

What she showed was what Chizuru had already seen, the letter X. A dying message they could only think the victim could have left.

“No, I think that was already on the ground when we got there... right Chizuru?”

Chizuru stared intently at the photograph, and slowly nodded.

“I see... then that’s all of our questions.”

Sorry for taking up your time, she said, “That guy will lead you to the exit,” she pointed at Atami. As he had recorded down Ibusuki’s rapid succession of questions and answers, he was quite winded. Chizuru looked at him with a bit of pity.

“... Could I ask something?”

After letting Ageha answer everything, and having spent his time in silence from beginning to end, Chizuru finally opened his mouth. A little intrigued, Ibusuki sent him a glance, and asked, “What is it?”

“The two of you are officers of the prefecture, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Questioning the persons who just happened to stumble upon the body and call in the report would usually be left to the people of the district. Why are you here?”

Ibusuki’s face curved in a sullen manner as she awkwardly removed her eyes from Chizuru.

“I doubt such a fact is relevant to...”

There, she suddenly closed her mouth and revised herself.

“... We have our own circumstance, is all I’ll say.”

Chizuru stared intently at her face, and after letting out a sigh, he spoke in a careless tone.

“If I’ve made you mindful of me then stop it. While I think you know who my father is, that’s irrelevant to any of this, so quit it with any special treatment.”

“... I’m sorry.”

After Ibusuki gave an apology without feelings behind it, she left the room, roughly closing the door behind her.

“... What was that all about?”

It was Officer Atami’s first question. Chizuru looked at him with some kindness in his eyes.

“About my... my dad?”

Chizuru would use a more polite tone with his superiors, but now he corrected himself. To cut to the chase, he had determined Atami wasn’t his superior.

“That’s right. As a matter of fact, that question you just asked was on my mind as well. Without any explanation, Ibusuki-san suddenly said, ‘we’re going off to question the highschooler who found the body,’ so I was surprised. Our

prefectural division rarely ever does those small jobs, you see.”

“... My dad’s head of the prefectural criminal affairs department. That’s all there is to it.”

“Eeh!? Your dad is?”

Seeking confirmation, Atami looked at Ageha. “It’s true,” she said lightly. And there Atami was left staring blankly.

“I see, it’s true our chief’s name is Kirishima, but... should I be using polite speech with you?”

“I already said I don’t need your mindfulness. More importantly, I have a question for you.”

“Oh really? What is it?”

“What exactly did you do?”

“!?”

“Seeing your mannerism up to now, it was clear enough. Officer Ibusuki works you especially hard. Even if coming here personally to do the questioning was to curry favor with the chief detective, transcribing the protocol could at least be left to someone lower on the pole. Meaning Officer Ibusuki has imposed some sort of penalty on you. Am I wrong?”

“Erk... as expected of our chief’s son. You’re absolutely correct.”

He let out a large sigh.

“Truth is a week ago, our division caught a certain larcenist and murderer red-handed, you see... while he was being taken in, I had him use the restroom in the parking area. Then he suddenly shook me off and ran away.”

“Eeh!? What were you doing!?”

Ageha cried out. Atami’s expression sunk into disgrace.

“There was no helping it. He was quiet up to that point, so I never thought he’d suddenly put up such a resistance... and so Ibusuki-san and the others managed to pin down the culprit, until they got to him, he managed to injure few children and elders. After giving me a stern reprimand, Ibusuki-san issued an order, ‘You’re going to be on grunt work for a long, long while,’ she said...”

While Atami seemed discouraged, “That was your own fault...” Ageha muttered. Atami carried on with his sorrows.

“The grunt work’s mainly, ‘Brew me some tea, buy me a lunch, carry my stuff, transcribe protocol, organize the files, drive’. I was on the detective track, so it was the first time I ever did these odd jobs. What’s more, Ibusuki san said, ‘I’ll take you out to the crime scene, for argument’s sake, but unless you help land a culprit ten times, you’re not getting off your penalty’...”

“I see.”

Chizuru suddenly hit his hands together.

“I’ve got it. Atami-san. I think I might be able to help you.”

“W-what’s wrong, Chizuru!? Do you have a fever or something!?”

“Ageha, what’s wrong with you?”

“It’s the first time I’ve ever seen Chizuru the trouble-evader offer say he actually wants to help someone!”

“... Really? Well, I’ve got some thoughts of my own.”

As Chizuru muttered that, he turned back to Atami.

“What’s this, um, Chizuru-kun. Could it be you’ll put in a good word to the department chief for me?”

“No way. There’s no way I’d do something as troublesome as that.”

“... Then how do you plan to help me?”

Givign an impish smile, Chizuru lazily went out.

“I’m saying I’ll solve this case in your stead.”

Atami was taken aback, his mouth left half open as he looked over Chizuru.

“... Um, and what do you mean by that?”

“If you’ll investigate and offer information to me, then I’ll resolve the case for you. Plain and simple.”

“You sure know how to sound conceited... but that’s downright impossible. This is linked to the credibility of us officers here. Regardless of whether or not you’re the chief’s son, I can’t leak our findings to an outsider like you.”

“But it’s true you’re troubled with investigating this case, right?”

Chizuru showered Atami with a level-headed gaze.

“That victim still had a full wallet, so it wasn’t a simple theft. In that case it would have to be a grudge. And the victim even politely left us a dying message.

But among the suspects that have come up in your search, you haven't found any linked to the letter X. How troublesome. That's the present state of your investigation, right?"

"H-how did you know that!?"

Atami stood forcefully from his desk. Chizuru boldly waved his hand to calm him.

"That's because Officer Ibusuki showed us the dying message. Normally, she wouldn't go as far as to show us the photo if she just wanted to confirm it. Which means it's that. She wanted to believe we were the ones who drew it. She wanted to observe our reactions from looking at the photo. Isn't that how it is, Officer Atami?"

"... You're right."

"So why would she be so obstinate in thinking the dying message was a fake? Precisely because there were no suspects it connected to, and the message itself was an inconvenience to the case... isn't that how I'd have to take it?"

"... Well you've got me there."

Atami covered the upper half of his face.

"You've seen through it all. That's how it is. We've found three suspects so far, but troublingly enough, none of them have an initial of X."

"Hey, just tell me about the case. If you do, I have confidence I'll definitely solve it."

"I can vouch for the Chizuru's intelligence."

Ageha gave a reserved addition.

Atami stayed silent for a while, but he gathered up his strength and lifted his head.

"Well, it's a request from the chief detective's son after all... guess there's no helping it... Yep, there's no helping it!"

He said it in desperation.

"Okay, got it. If you've said that much, then there's no helping it. I'll tell you a little bit about the case. With my previous incident, I've been taken off the front lines of investigation, and I was just growing bored. Let's meet up at nine at the restaurant in front of Yumoto Station... how does that sound?"

“Very well.”

Only from Ageha’s position was Chizuru’s profile visible. His right face covered up by his long-grown bangs. There, a dark grin floated up. Ageha knew. It was the face he made when he was thinking of something awful.

“Ageha.”

Chizuru’s voice had an impish tinge to it.

“I found a job.”

Part 3

The casual diner in front of the station, Softpoached Land. Of all the national chains, it boasted a reputation of being the most unrefined one.

Chizuru and Ageha sat next to one another, at a table in the back. Around five minutes past nine, the store was empty.

“... Officer Atami is late.”

On Ageha’s words, Chizuru held the straw in his mouth, and gave a short, “Mmn” in reply. He sent his breath down the tube, causing his melon soda to bubble. Across his listless double eyelids, his eyes gazed blankly at the dark-green beverage.

Ageha languidly breathed out a sigh. For a while now, she had rested her chin over her hands in boredom. The words that suddenly came from the girl were a terrible trifle.

“Yeah, Officer Atami’s got that wimpy bottom vibe to him, right Chizuru?”

“... What were we talking about again?”

At times, she had a tendency to blurt out the strangest things.

While that was going on, Officer Atami entered the shop in great haste.

“Sorry! I’m running late.”

He waved his hand to cut the air in front of his face.

“I was put in charge of various odd jobs, and it took quite some time to get out of them. Real sorry, Chizuru-kun, Ageha-san.”

“Oh?”

Ageha grinned.

“He’s already calling Chizuru by first name? Officer Atami. He really is a special one.”

“Eh, well... Calling him Kirishima-kun just doesn’t seem right; can’t help but think of our section’s chief. Sorry if I’ve offended you.”

“Oh no one’s offended here! Continue on by all means!!”

“Just ignore her, Officer Atami. Have a seat.”

“Hey, Chizuru, wasn’t that just a little bit cruel?”

Facing Ageha’s outbursts head on didn’t put a dent in them, so in these cases, one’s best bet was to ignore them. Sitting across from them, Officer Atami was urged to go into the case.

“Um, then I’ll start with an outline.

The victim is Shinozaki Kouichi-san, 44. A social studies teacher at Shimoda Junior High, three stops down the line from Yumoto Station. The cause of death was a knife wound inflicted from behind. Estimated time of death was a little before you two found the body... a little passed six, perhaps.”

“I already knew most of that.”

Chizuru mumbled.

“So how did you narrow down the suspects?”

“Ah, about that. The victim lived around a five minute walk from his place of employment, and he returned to his house around five. His next door neighbor witnessed it.”

“Oh? Isn’t it a bit early for a school teacher to get home at five? Aren’t there clubs and stuff?”

Officer Atami nodded.

“He was assistant advisor of the wind instruments ensemble, but it seems he was mostly irrelevant to their activities. So once his classes were over, he was the type of teacher who finished whatever work he had, and went straight home...

Anyways. After he returned, around thirty minutes went by, and around five thirty, his neighbor saw him go out again.”

“He seemed to be witnessed quite often, and these times are awfully precise. Who’s this man’s neighbor supposed to be?”

While Ageha said it in jest, Atami gave a serious reply.

“His neighbor— all the way from five to a little passed five thirty— was held down in the entranceway talking to a friend... a so-called exchange between housewives. So she witnessed Shinozaki’s coming and going. The accuracy of the time owes to the fact his movements coincidentally happened to coincide

with the anime opening and ending themes she could hear from her son watching TV in the living room.”

“I see. From five to five thirty would have to be the American football anime, ‘Gaikyuu!!’ perhaps? I think I’d get along with that boy just fine.”

“Hah?”

“Officer Atami, just ignore it.”

Chizuru getting the better of him, Atami returned to topic.

“Right, anyways, when he left, his neighbor called out and asked, ‘Going somewhere?’ and Shinozaki replied, ‘Yeah, one of my coworkers just called and asked for my help’. And he walked straight towards the station, is how the story goes.

Meaning it’s quite natural to think... the coworker who called him out murdered him in that vacant lot.”

“How logical.”

Said Chizuru.

“Our last record of Shinozaki’s movements comes from the security camera set at Yumoto Station’s ticket gate. It was recorded at five fifty. There’s quite a bit of distance from the station to that lot. If you calculate out the time, Shinozaki is thought to have been murdered as soon as he arrive. This is also part of our basis to assume he was killed by the one who called him there. Now then, it’s finally come to it. Have a good look at the three suspects we got it down to.”

Atami took out three pictures from the pocket of his coat.

“By the phone records, in the space of five to five thirty when Shinozaki was home, these three were the ones who contacted him. They’re all, much like him, teaching staff at Shimoda Junior High. Ah, he also got a call from a car manufacturer, but that was most likely a sales call without any relevance to this case. Anyways, we have three suspects.”

Saying something’s not relevant is totally a forewarning that it will prove completely relevant in a mystery novel sense... or so Chizuru muttered in his heart.

“Let’s start with the first person who called. This person. His name’s

Nakameguro Tsutome.”

Atami pointed at the photo to Chizuru’s left. Crew cut, a stern face, and muscular build, a man who gave off every indicator of teaching phys ed, but apparently an art teacher.

“Nakameguro is the advisor of the art club, but he isn’t very involved with the club itself. Like Shinozaki, he’s the type who goes home with a lot of time on his hands. According to him, with tomorrow being a weekend, he invited Shinozaki out to drink. But Shinozaki said he’d rather not.”

“Hmm. Did he give a reason?”

On Ageha’s question, Atami shrugged.

“From the start, Shinozaki wasn’t a particularly social person, apparently. Even in the school, he’d only ever conduct businesslike conversations with his fellow teachers. Well, he was a happy drunk, and an interesting person when he had a bit in his system, so they’d sometimes invite him out, or so Nakameguro had to say on the matter.”

“... Next?”

“You’re an impatient one, aren’t you. Umm, the next call was from Mine Rikako. Despite the rika in her name, she teaches music. She advises the wind instrument ensemble.”

(TL: Rika means science.)

Displayed on the center picture was a woman in her early thirties who looked to have a good head on her shoulders.

“The reason she called was for the wind ensemble’s competition tomorrow; she wanted to use Shinozaki’s car... she called to ask, it seems. It was necessary to transport the instruments. Shinozaki’s house was close to the school, and he was assistant advisor, so she had all the reason to, I’d have to say. Anyways, based on her word, Shinozaki agreed in an instant, and the call was over in no time.”

“But wait.”

Ageha stuck her mouth in.

“I was in the wind ensemble back in middle school, and even among the culture clubs it was a relatively strict one. Shouldn’t that Kuwabata teacher still

have been at school around six?”

“I’m sad to say she has no alibi.”

Atami slowly shook his head.

“Tomorrow’s competition is set for early morning, and in today’s club activities, they just did some final adjustments on their performance, and called it a day early.”

“I see.”

“The third caller was this Hijikata Kenzaburou, a science teacher... ah, I’ll just say it now; this person’s advisor of the programming club, but as you might have expected, there were no club activities today. So he has no alibi.”

The man in the final photo looked to still be in his twenties. Sharp eyes under his glasses, with an overly logical air.

“Ah, that guy’s definitely a top. A super sadist in glasses.”

“? Beppu-san, what are you talking about?”

“Officer Atami, ignore her.”

Chizuru said in quick monotone.

“Y-yeah. Now returning to topic. Hijikata’s business on the phone was quite a heavy one... Truth is, in the class he was homeroom teacher of, there was an incident of bullying. Hijikata had moved to resolve the issue, but it was the first time he had ever been a homeroom teacher, and as Shinozaki was head of year, alongside issuing a report, Hijikata asked for various pieces of advice on teaching, it seems.”

“Bullying... yeah, that really is serious.”

Ageha groaned. Once that groan faded away, a silence dropped onto the table.

“So how is it, Chizuru-kun?”

Atami thought it was right time to ask.

“Nakameguro Tsutomu is T. N., Mine Rikako is R.M., and Hijikata Kenzaburou’s K.H.. None of them have the initial the victim left behind... an X in their names. What could this mean? Could that dying message have been a diversionary tactic?”

“No, it was real.”

Chizuru spoke slowly. Atami’s eyes opened wide.

“W-what do you mean? Could it be you already know the culprit?”

“The distinction is clear.”

Atami raised a cry of shock as he stood from his seat. Meanwhile, Ageha casually let out her opinion that she had heard that line somewhere before. To her, Chizuru’s words were in no way unexpected.

“How? How could you tell the culprit from that measly bit of information!?”

“I mean, of the three suspects one of them must clearly be lying, right? The reason the culprit actually phoned Shinozaki-san was to call him out to that vacant lot... are you following me?”

“Well yeah.”

“I’m sure the culprit panicked when asked by you officers why they called the victim. So they lied. Badly. The culprit ended up telling a lie that was definitely impossible.”

“What do you mean? Then who would that make the culprit out to be?”

“... Fifty thousand yen.”

“What?”

Atami blankly opened his mouth, but Chizuru replied in expressionless tranquility.

“Fifty thousand yen. That is the price of resolving this case...”

Bloody hell, said Ageha as she held her head.

“Come to think of it, you did say you found work... ‘a job where I don’t have to put in any effort at all, and can just use my mind for a high pay’... maybe you really have struck gold.”

“Hey, Officer Atami.”

Chizuru said it in a tone a child could understand.

“You entered the prefectural police investigation department on the detective track. But with one miss, you were put on grunt work. I’m sure you’re irritated. You want to quickly round up ten bad guys and clear up your name. If it’s for that sake, what’s a little bit of money to you?”

“No, but fifty thousand yen is...”

“I’ll give you a discount next time.”

“You’re working under a premise of a next time!?”

“Now, now, if you don’t hurry up, Officer Ibusuki and the others will catch the real culprit. What are you going to do?”

Atami was struck silent. Silence flowed by. A minute, then two. Around the time Chizuru thought he’d count three minutes flow by, Atami slowly opened his mouth.

“You really know who the culprit is?”

“Of course?”

“And the meaning of the dying message?”

“Naturally.”

“... Understood. Fifty thousand yen. I’ll have it for you by tomorrow. So tell me the truth you’ve reached. If your logic is off the mark, you won’t get any reward. How does that sound?”

Chizuru made a smile with enough leisure to spare.

“No problem at all.”

Answer

It had only been a mere ten minutes since Officer Atami had arrived, but in that space, the number of customers had gone down considerably. At present, close to nine thirty at Softboiled Land, apart from Chizuru and his two companions, there were only three guests in the shop.

“... Well.” Ordering a long-overdue cup of hot coffee, Atami looked at Chizuru. “Then could I hear you out? Your deductions.”

“There was one liar among the three suspects, right?”

Ageha stepped in. She pointed at one of the pictures.

“Could it be that Hijikata science teacher?”

Why? Asked Chizuru in a tone where his emotions couldn't be read.

“In regards to the bullying problem, it's all well and good he consulted with the year head, but tomorrow's a week end. Would anyone really go out of their way to phone in such an issue before break? Wouldn't it just be a burden on them all the way?”

“Sure enough, you could think of it like that, but you couldn't say it's definitely impossible. Perhaps he wanted to do whatever he could about it before everyone went on break.

... The reason I said impossible wasn't a question of mentality, someone clearly told a lie that contradicts reality.”

“Okay, got it,” said Atami, shaking off his drowsiness, “Anyways, let's hear out your reasoning.”

Chizuru tilted his head a bit, and made a sage-like expression.

“... First, look at this.”

From his blazer pocket, Chizuru pulled out the victim's driver's licence.

“Yeah, yeah, thanks for that. Um, let's see. Shinozaki Kouichi, registered driver. Address... wait, this is the victim's! Where? When?”

“At the vacant lot that became the crime scene, before the people from the district rushed over.”

“Hey, what do you think you’re doing, Chizuru-kun! That’s no good! No good at all!!”

“Ah, those are some nice screams. Atami-san’s a bottom after all.”

“Eh? What? Bottom? I’m sorry, Beppu-san, I didn’t quite catch that.”

“You don’t need to catch anything, officer Atami. More importantly, let’s get back on topic.”

Ageha muttered and Atami inquired, and Chizuru silenced the lot of them. The same pattern that had been repeating for a while now developed once more.

“Now officer, it won’t be too late to scold me after you’ve captured the true culprit. So about that driver’s license, it was in the victim’s wallet. What do you think about that?”

“Eh? Well, there’s nothing strange about it. A license is often used as a form of identification, so it’s standard to put it in your wallet.”

“That’s precisely right. But there’s also a large group that keep theirs in the glove box or in the folds of the sun visor. It’s an obligation to have your license on you while driving, so they do it to make sure they never forget.”

“Um... what exactly are you trying to say?”

“Let’s get the three testimonies in order, shall we. About the reason why the suspects called the victim.”

Ignoring Atami’s question, Chizuru went on at his own pace.

“Art teacher Nakameguro, ‘Invited the victim out for a drink’. Music teacher Mine, ‘Asked to use the victim’s car for the wind ensemble competition tomorrow’. Science teacher Hijikata, ‘reported and consulted with the head of year over a bullying problem in the class he was charged with’... one of these things is not like the others. Which one could it be.”

“... Could it be the music teacher Mine?”

“Why do you say so, Ageha?”

“No, you’ve been pushing the driver’s license point for a while now, so I just chose the one related to that.”

A bitter smile on his mouth, Chizuru said, “That’s quite a meta reason, but

correct.”

Atami cried out an, ‘Eeh?’

“What part of that testimony was strange? The victim was the assistant advisor of the wind ensemble, so it’s only natural she ask he use his car for transport.”

“Asking isn’t strange. But Mine Rikako also said this: ‘Shinozaki agreed in an instant, and the call was over in no time.’ That one’s a lie.”

“No, there wasn’t anything strange about it.”

“No, there was everything strange about it. When a person who’s put in his broken-down car for repairs is asked to drive it out early tomorrow morning, there’s no way he would say yes.”

“... His car’s in for repairs?”

Atami raised his tone in confusion.

“How could you know something like that?”

“Let’s get back to the driver’s license. If the victim was the sort who usually kept his license in his car, then if he went out of his way to put it in his wallet, it’s thinkable that his car is in for repairs, right?”

“You can’t call that sound reasoning,” Atami abruptly let out a fed-up tone.

“That’s just a stretched-out assumption. You can’t deny that the victim may have been someone who usually carried his license around in his wallet. I mean, those sorts of people aren’t rare in any sense of the word.”

“Yes. That’s why the license itself is only support evidence. My real reasons are the two points I’m about to raise.”

As if to make a V, Chizuru held up two of his right hand’s fingers.

“Proof number one. The victim was caught on camera at the ticket barrier of Yumoto Station.”

“...? How is that connected to a broken car?”

“If the victim had a car he could drive, why didn’t he go to the vacant lot crime scene by car? Why did he have to take the train three stations and then walk?”

“It’s true there’s quite a bit of distance between the station and the lot, so you’d normally use a car... maybe he tried to use his car, but he just happened to be out of gas...?”

“Now listen here, Officer Atami. By his neighbor’s testimony, the victim made straight for the station after leaving the house. If he just happened to be out of gas, he’d have to notice that after first stopping by the parking lot.”

“Yeah, then maybe he noticed his low tank the last time he’d driven it?”

“Does having low gas mean you can’t move your car at all?”

“No, no, that’s not what I mean,” Atami sounded somewhat impatient, “He would have to be just a few steps from empty.”

“In that case,” Chizuru leisurely smiled, “the victim would have used his car after all. The reason being, the victim had a promise to keep with Mine tomorrow morning... he had to use his car. In order to shorten whatever business he’d have to go through that morning, going out the previous day to put gas would be the natural response. Of course, if the car was in a must more serious state than an empty tank, there’s no way he would instantly agree to Mine’s request.”

“... You’re right. Come to think of it, Nakameguro did say he was the type who didn’t talk about himself much in the workplace. The victim commuted to work on foot, so it wouldn’t be strange if his colleague Mine didn’t know it was in for repairs.”

“Right, and the cincher is the call from the car manufacturer... makers can often be tasked with repairs as well. I’m sure that was a call to say his repairs had been completed. Ah, by the way,” Chizuru sensed Atami’s intent to refute, “don’t tell me he said yes to Mine because he received that call. To review matters, his departure would be in the early morning tomorrow. For someone who would have to go to the plant to pick up his car, I doubt he would ‘instantly agree’. And that call came in after Mine’s.

Taking all these facts into account, her call was to summon the victim to that vacant lot, and there’s no doubt she told a lie in order to cover it up. Correct me if I’m wrong Ageha, but in the first place, ‘Do you really put off a job as important as arranging transport for instruments to the day before the competition?’ I think there’s a problem of mentality there.”

Once Chizuru finished his spiel, as if all tuckered out, he sipped his melon soda. “I see,” said Ageha, her words intermingled with a sigh.

“Sure enough, you’ve given me reason to suspect Mine’s request to borrow

his car was a lie. Perhaps you're right. But unless you provide an explanation for that dying message, you can't quite call her the culprit."

"Of course, I know that too."

"Oh, how do you figure?" Ageha tilted her head, "I mean Mine Rikako's initials are

R. M. right? I don't see any room for a X there. Other than that, she's a music teacher, and the advisor of the wind ensemble..."

"You don't have to think so hard. That X was decisively that woman's name."

"... What?" Atami seemed bewildered, "How does X become Mine Rikako?"

"You listening, Officer Atami? Then look over here."

Chizuru took out a pen, and wrote a, 'X' on the napkin with motions slow enough to irritate Atami.

"The victim stabbed in the back had to write the culprit's name in the small space of life he had left. As short as possible, as simple as he knew. But Mine Rikako is just a bit too long."

"Then couldn't he have shortened it?"

"He could have, but to the social studies teacher Shinozaki, a different method had come to mind... Shorter than anything he could have shortened it to, something that would plainly illustrate the culprit's name. But even with that, he was unable to add the last two lines before he drew his last breath."

And at the bottom of the 'X', he drew a short perpendicular dash at the top of each line. Both Ageha and Atami let out cries of realization.

Just as they had seen in their geography textbooks, it was the map symbol for a mine.



A little past seven the following morning, as Chizuru waited by the ticket gate of Yumoto Station, Atami arrived. Within the morning rush, he who looked as if a shoddy suit would suit him had the makings of an average salaryman perfectly fit to enter the gates and go off to work.

"I've kept you waiting. Well now Mine Rikako confessed to the crime. Her motive was the victim Shinozaki-san using his position as a superior to conduct terrible displays of sexual harassment. What's more, he even took obscene

photos that left no room for misunderstanding, forcing her into a relationship, and with no choice left she killed him. To call him out to the vacant lot, she had made use of those feelings from the victim. Well, it's hard to forgive the deceased, but a murder is a murder. She's currently being interrogated by Ibusuki-san. Ah, I was able to skillfully play off your pilfering of the license."
"I'll be in your care."

Giving a somewhat mistaken thanks, Chizuru's listless remained focused on the envelope in Atami's right hand. The envelope containing a fresh fifty thousand yen withdrawn from his account.
Atami let out a sigh.

"A promise is a promise. To be honest, the fact the victim's car was sent in for repairs was uncovered by the police force before the end of the day. But, well, solving the dying message is your achievement, and it's all thanks to you that the merits went to me."

Chizuru took the envelope, leaking the words, "It's a good thing you're so honest," from his mouth.

"This boy really is impertinent!"

Atami rubbed his knuckle against Chizuru's head. The trouble-hating Chizuru let out an, "Ow. Ow. Ow," in a monotone that made one doubt whether he was in pain or just plain tired.

"Whoah!!"

The one who raised a cry of delight as they left the ticket gate was, to the surprise of none, Ageha. Her face collapsed into a smile as if melting away as she made for the two.

"So early in the morning! Entangled with one another so early in the morning!! You have my deepest thanks!"

"Now, Officer Atami, get back to work already."

"Eh? What's with you two? You're giving me the cold shoulder all of a sudden, Chizuru."

"It's for your own sake."

Shrugging his shoulders in continued incomprehension, he left a few words

of, ‘See ya,’ as he left the two.

“Ah, do you need my contact information, Officer Atami?”

As Atami turned his back, Chizuru called to stop him.

His body stopping in his tracks, he turned around awkwardly.

“What are you talking about? I’m never going to ask for this sort of thing again. So I don’t need your contact information. Thank you, and good bye.”

As if to run away, he disappeared into the crowd. Seeing off his back, Chizuru’s lips curled into a smile.

“... You won’t be able to make it alone.”

His mutterings were almost like those of a child who’d found a new toy, thought Ageha.

(TL: Okay, so in the original text, Mine Rikako’s name was Kuwabata Rikako. The dying message was that he was trying to write:

, which is the Japanese map symbol for a mulberry field, literally pronounced Kuwabata. I do apologize if this translation has made the case seem dumber than the original. Really. BTW, the symbol for a mine is

)